

A Goal for Every Frame

By Martin Shapiro

For every frame of a game, you should set a goal for the frame before your first shot. The simplest, most basic goals are ‘clear, clear, clear and score your hammer’ when it is your hammer and ‘attempt to steal the hammer’ when it is your opponent’s hammer. These are good goals and overall winning strategy but are way too simplistic or not applicable for many frames.

CourtShuffleboard.com scope note: Frame goals must be based on the actual game format, score, hammer sequence, court conditions, and available shots. The examples here illustrate the planning process; they are not universal prescriptions for every game or organization.

SET THE GOAL

Let’s say your partner at the head has hit the line on their hammer shot, so now you are a score behind. You should no longer just have ‘clear, clear, clear, score your hammer’ as your goal for your frame. You need to set a new goal to recover from your partner’s missed hammer shot. Your goal should be to develop two scores instead of just the one hammer score. If you are playing a points game, sometimes scoring two discs while letting your opponent score one is enough to take the lead based on who will get to game point first. Sometimes you can’t let your opponent score in the same frame, but you need two scores or a kitchen and a score. Or sometimes just kitchening your opponent without your own scoring disc is enough. Figure it out at the beginning of the frame, set it as your goal and play accordingly.

PLAY TO THE GOAL

If you need two scores, when your opponent sets a St Pete guard, fill in instead of clear. If your opponent covers your fill-in, take the thin alley shot for an extra score. If your opponent covers the alley, go for the bump up of your fill-in. If your opponent kitchens your fill-in, go for the reverse. But if you don’t need two scores, don’t fill-in! Clear instead. Or if you need two scores, already have one hidden down the alley, don’t go for another even if you have the opportunity as you might end up with one or the other in the kitchen, or you might kill the good one and not score the second. Stick to your goal – two scores and none for your opponent. Sure, there are times where the perfect opportunity arises to achieve more, and you are welcome to go for it. Just don’t do it at the risk of losing your goal entirely.

Now let’s say I have a nice lead and my goal is just the basic attempt to steal the hammer for the frame as long as I don’t risk my lead. For my first shot, I set a St Pete. My opponent misses the clear entirely. What would I do? Set a Tampa. I don’t need to immediately use the St Pete to attempt a hide. Why? It’s not my goal for the frame to play a board game to try to get ahead. I’m just trying to steal the hammer if I can without taking risks. If I take the hide on my second shot, there is a chance my opponent will find a way to kitchen me. Or maybe I’ll kitchen myself trying to make that perfect hide behind a single guard. Or I might miss and land on the line, and now my opponent has a second opportunity to clear the guard, making it harder for me to reach my goal of stealing the hammer if I can. Maybe later in the frame I’ll take a hide if I’m not able to set up a wall of guards to steal the hammer. Once I’ve got two guards set, the St Pete and the Tampa, I will have two ways to steal the hammer – build the wall of guards that makes it

hard or impossible for my opponent to score their hammer, or on my last disc, score behind a remaining guard if I won't be exposed. And if I fail to reach my goal and steal the hammer? Not a tragedy – if I started the frame in the lead, that means I finish the frame in the lead even if my opponent scores their hammer. If that isn't the case, well then, I wasn't actually in the lead for the frame in the first place and I likely was playing the wrong strategy. Assume your opponent will score their hammer when you calculate at the beginning of the frame who is in the lead.

A TOURNAMENT EXAMPLE

As the game progresses, your goal for each frame will likely get more complicated and more critical. Consider another example, the score is 59 to 53, black's hammer at the head in a 75-point game. What should be the goal for the frame for yellow? 'Do not let black score two discs no matter what'. I ran into this recently in the third match of the quarter-finals in a statewide tournament. My partner was playing yellow at the head. On his last disc, he had a doubling disc on the 7/8 line behind a St Pete, and black had an exposed doubling disc on the 7/8 line on the other side. My partner shot to double his hidden yellow. A mistake! He only got one score and the opponent doubled for two. It didn't really matter much that my partner didn't successfully double – even if he had succeeded, it was the wrong shot to take. My partner's only concern should have been preventing his opponent from scoring two discs, to give his partner the opportunity to make his hammer for the win in the next frame. My partner did not set a goal for the frame – just played it for scores. We lost and got eliminated from the tournament.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Every frame in a game is different than every other frame. Don't assume that scoring your hammers and stopping your opponent's hammers is all that is needed to win. A game almost never proceeds in such a linear fashion. At the beginning of each frame, think about what you need to do at that moment to advance towards the win. Do that. Don't do what you don't need. At the end of the game, the scoreboard will be erased. It won't matter how big the difference in scores, only who had the winning score.